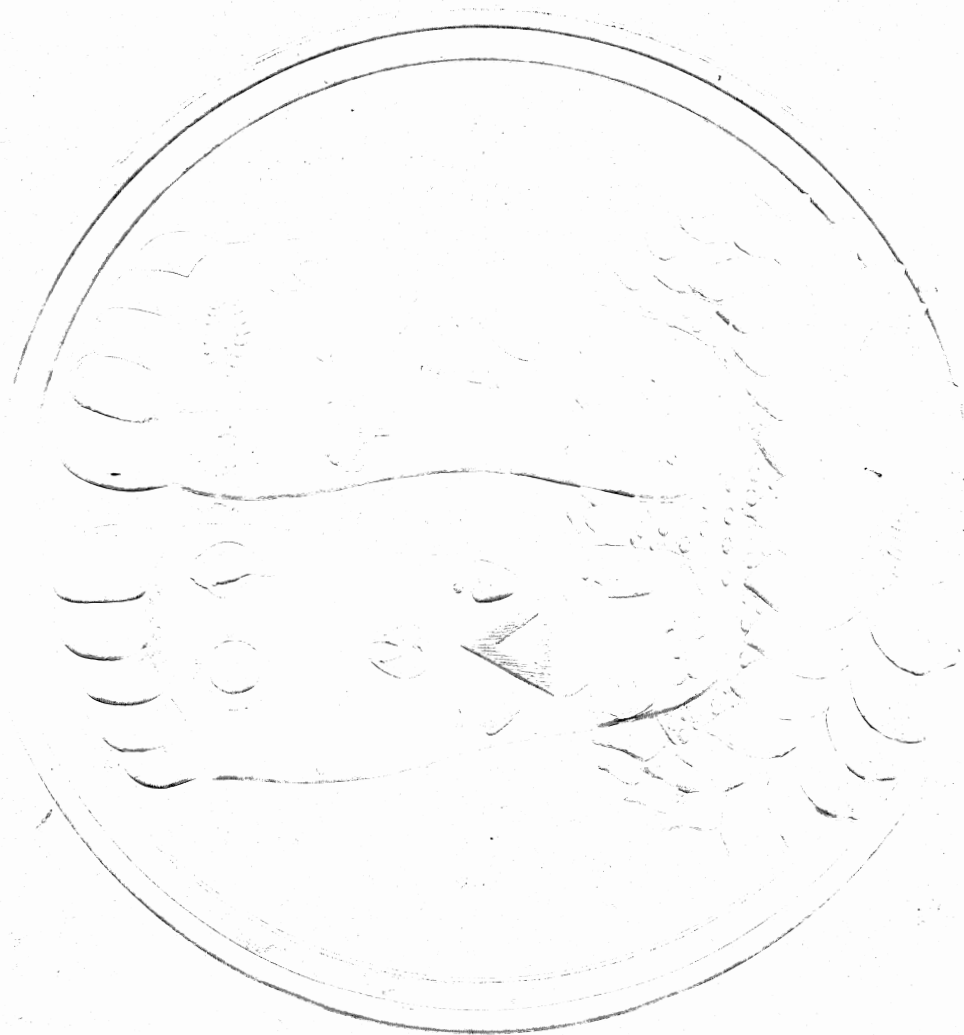
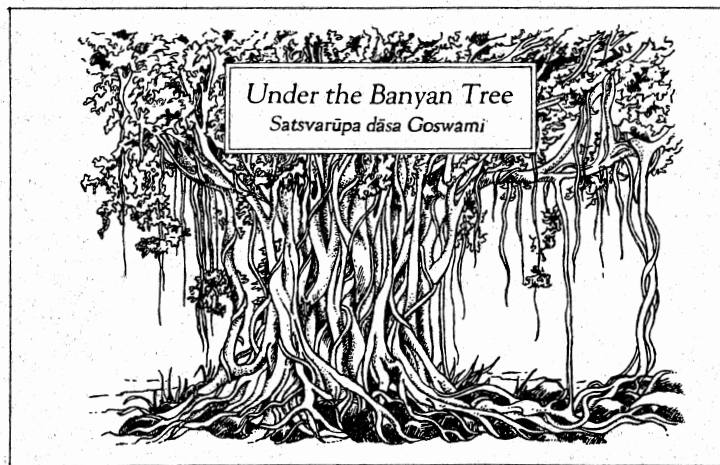


THE DUST of VRINDABAN

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami





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THE DUST of VRINDABAN

Cover: O Krishna, our kingdom is now being marked by the impressions of Your feet, and therefore it appears beautiful. But when You leave, it will no longer be so.

"There are certain particular marks on the feet of Sri Krishna which distinguish Him from others. The marks of a flag, thunderbolt, an instrument to drive an elephant, umbrella, lotus, disc., etc., are on the bottoms of Krishna's feet. These marks are impressed upon the soft dust of Vrindaban." (*Bhagavat Purana* 1.8.39, text and purport by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda)

Artwork: Lila-Avatara-devi dasi, Vrindavani-devi dasi, Artwork courtesy of Vrindaban Cooperative Trust.

THE DUST of VRINDABAN

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami

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INTRODUCTION

Many of the original Japanese haiku poets, such as Basho and Issa, were deeply influenced by Buddhism. Even today among Western writers of haiku there is a spiritual tendency. One is advised to lose one's personal self in a greater awareness of nature, or in special moments of human exchange.

By contrast, a Krishna conscious vision is one in which the spiritualist sees the oneness of all things in relation to the Personality of Godhead. As with the Zen poet or haikuist, the vision of the Krishna *bhakta* is born not of mere dogma, but of direct experience. As Lord Krishna states in *Bhagavad-gita*, "For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me."

For a devotee of Krishna, this spiritual existence is especially available in Vrindaban, India. Vrindaban is the place where Krishna manifested His pastimes on earth. Although Krishna appeared there thousands of years ago, Vrindaban remains surcharged with His presence. Even today, all the residents of Vrindaban have a direct relationship with Krishna. The Vedic scriptures state that even the animals and birds of Vrindaban are fortunate and must have performed pious activities in past lives in order to be able to live in Vrindaban. Whoever lives and dies in Vrindaban has the best opportunity for attaining the eternal abode of Krishna at the time of death.

Descriptions of Vrindaban must take into account the particular consciousness of its residents, ancient tradition, and intimate connection with Sri Krishna. A devotee who has been to Vrindaban and tasted even a drop of this nectar likes to share it with others. Even if they cannot travel to India, those who may be curious about places like Vrindaban may easily partake of the spirit of Vrindaban by hearing about it. As stated in the *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, "The devotee should always think of Krishna within, and he should live in Vrindaban. If one is physically unable to go to Vrindaban, then he should live there mentally."

A NOTE ON SANSKRIT WORDS

At the risk of being seen as an obscure sectarian, I have used a number of Sanskrit words and a few Hindi words in my haiku. There are, however, valid reasons for keeping these words in their original form.

Every poet has to translate his or her experience into words. In recording his haiku moments, a poet has to strike the right balance between being truthful to his experience and communicating in an aesthetically effective way. At least in some cases, it simply will not do to translate the words and thoughts which occurred to one at the moment of spontaneous experience into an entirely different language. Since I am a devotee of Krishna, my life is filled with many Sanskrit sounds and readings, and I can't omit them all.

Translations of Japanese haiku occasionally retain Japanese words. In these cases, the Japanese word helps to maintain the original haiku flavor. And there may be no exact equivalent word in English. Most readers don't feel imposed upon by this. We accept the new words as additions to our vocabulary, expansions of our cultural awareness.

I may cite some examples from the translations of R. H. Blyth. Blyth frequently retains words like *kasa*, *tatami*, and *hototogisu*, assuming that most haiku readers will know enough about Japanese culture to understand them. Some words, however, like *konnyaku*, *yamabuki*, *shikimi*, *ominaeshi*, *okumi*, and *amma*, may not be as well known. In such cases, a short commentary or a footnote quickly fills us in.

A number of Blyth translations include the Japanese utterance of Buddhist chants or *mantras*:

Chanting the *nembutsu*,
coolness fills
fields and mountains.

—Kyorai

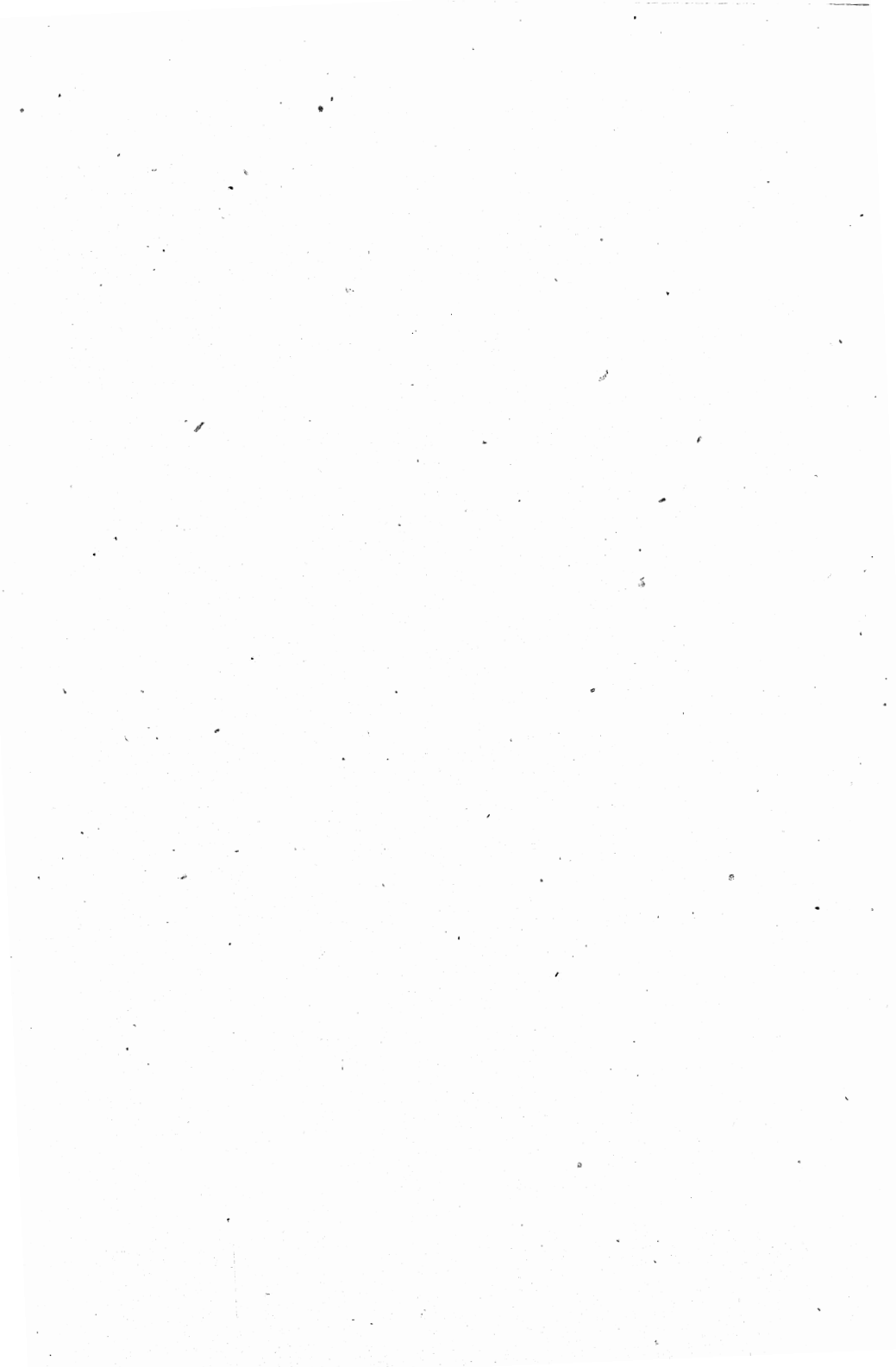
Even in this present world,
birds sing
“*Hokekyo!*”

—Issa

Such key words in the original language help us to enter further into the personal world of the poet.

I have kept Sanskrit words to a bare minimum. If readers are willing, they may savor these sound vibrations and find them appealing. Translations of the more uncommon Sanskrit terms appear as footnotes, and a glossary is provided at the end of the book. I hope to hear from the readers whether they feel satisfied by this arrangement.

—Satsvarupa dasa Goswami
December 9, 1986



ENTERING THE DHAM

Wearing a bright light-green shawl and balancing two pots—one clay, one brass—on her head, a woman walks the Delhi-Agra road. I have traveled this road before, but have I yet remembered Krishna en route, as do the pure devotees?

To Vrindaban—
on the way,
a human corpse.

From the tourist complex,
out jogging,
an elephant.

Pressing his horn,
the taxi *walla* passes
a truck adorned with Shiva.

Vrindaban turn-off,
billboard of Krishna—
I'm still far away.

MANDIR

In front of the temple, I recognize the rickshaw driver in the orange shirt. We exchange greetings. Krishna-Balaram Mandir, built by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, is in a rural neighborhood, Raman-rei ("enchanted sands"). Here Krishna sported with His brother Balaram in forests filled with birds, monkeys, and other Vrindaban wildlife. Its sands are pleasant to the touch.

Belatedly,
I prostrate my body
in the sand.

On the porch
a monkey sizes me up—
pigeons cooing.

October 22

About Raman-reti, Lord Krishna speaks to His cowherd friends:

My dear friends, just see how this riverbank is extremely beautiful because of its pleasing atmosphere, and just see how the blooming lotuses are attracting bees and birds by their aroma. The humming and chirping of the bees and birds are echoing throughout the beautiful trees in the forest. Also, here the sands are clean and soft. Therefore, this must be considered the best place for our sporting pastimes.

—*Bhagavat Purāna*

Autumn:
even without tail feathers
the peacock struts.

Land of Vraja,*
with his rear legs
the dog kicks up dust.

Cool weather:
new piglets
crowd the lane.

*Another name for Vrindaban.

I meditate
under a *jhokra* tree
where thrushes are quarreling.

The temple of Madan-mohan (Krishna, the attractor of Cupid) was built five hundred years ago by Sanatan Goswami. We go for a predawn visit.

Red limestone dome
ruining with age,
fresh grass atop.

At the ancient well
 once used by Sanatan,
 a bare *sadhu* bathes.

A painting in his *kurir*:*
 Sanatan in loincloth
 visited by Krishna.

*A small hut used for meditation and chanting.

It was quiet
'til you awoke—
sparrow.

Singing softly
a *sadhu* bows
before another *sadhu*'s tomb.

Jiva Goswami established the Radha-Damodar temple in 1599 and installed the Deity of Krishna known as Damodar, "One whose mother tied Him with ropes." Here great saints would gather to glorify Krishna.

At Jiva's tomb,
my knees touch stone—
the monkeys move in closer.

With drums and cymbals,
the poor people
enter the temple singing.

Walking quickly,
chanting Hare Krishna:
a supple, barefoot boy.

Srila Prabhupada, my spiritual master, lived at Radha-Damodar temple in the early 1960s. He would rise in the early morning hours and translate the *Bhagavat Purana* and think of giving Krishna to the world.

Sitting reverently
in my master's room,
I stretch out my legs.

Thinking what was it like
when he was here.
A frog jumps through the lattice.

The window view—
devotees walk
past Rupa's *kutir*.

Locking the room,
taking the dust
of the Vaishnavas.

“When shall I become fortunate to visit Mathura-puri and shed tears of bliss as I drink from the stream of nectar flowing from the mouths of the old guides there who say, ‘Here was Nanda Maharaja’s home. Here the cart was broken. Here Lord Damodar, who breaks the bonds of birth and death for His devotees, was Himself tied with ropes by mother Yashoda. Here by the Yamuna River Krishna killed the Keshi demon’ ? ”

—Sri Kavisekhara

Talking loudly
an oarsman
plies through the Yamuna.

In the river,
rumors of turtles.

A man chasing a horse
catches up to him
at Keshi-ghat.*

*At the Yamuna bathing place known as Keshi-ghat, Sri Krishna killed a demon named Keshi, who appeared as a horse.

His hair in matted locks,
an ascetic
throws seeds to the pigeons.

Shawl over his head,
a devotee of Hanuman
sits at the shrine.

At the *Keshi-ghat*,
a vicious dog fight,
aftergrowls.

“Go ahead and worship Lord Brahma! Go ahead and worship Lord Shiva! Go ahead and worship the Supreme Brahman! I shall not follow you. I shall simply worship the Vrindaban forest, which brought transcendental delight to Lord Krishna.”

—from the *Padyavali*, compiled by
Rupa Goswami; author unknown

This forest crane
like Bakasura,*
sighing and grunting.

*Bakasura was a giant crane-demon who came to kill Krishna and His friends in Vrindaban.

Alone in the woods
the parrots predominate.

Wandering
into Vrindaban forest—
two mongrels.

Leaving the forest,
the secret's secure.

Narottam das Thakur was a Bengali-Vaishnava poet who lived in the late sixteenth century. He wrote in simple Bengali, but his songs are as authoritative as the *Vedas* themselves. His Deity of Krishna is installed in the Radha-Gokulananda temple, where Narottam's body is entombed.

"When will that opportune moment come to us when there will be shivering of the body as soon as we chant Lord Chaitanya's name? While chanting Hare Krishna, when will there be tears in the eyes?"

—from "Longings," by Narottam das Thakur

Into this silent yard,
bells from a second temple,
drums from a third.

Up all night temple-visiting,
he brings me water
from Radha's pond.

Before the poet's tomb,
cool thoughts
under a half moon.

Narotam prays,
"O Moon of Gokula,*
let my appeal touch Your ears."

*Krishna.

“When can we see Krishna?”
The young priest
holds up eight fingers.

“When Sri Chaitanya was elsewhere, the very name of Vrindaban was sufficient to increase His ecstatic love; now, when He was actually traveling to the Vrindaban forests, His mind was absorbed in great ecstatic love, day and night. He ate and bathed simply out of habit. While in Vrindaban, Sri Chaitanya liked to stay at Imli-tala (the place of the tamarind tree), where He chanted the names of God in solitude. Near Imli-tala, a very cool breeze blew while Sri Chaitanya saw the beauty of Vrindaban and the water of the river Yamuna.”

—*Chaitanya-charitamrita*

In the courtyard of the temple at Imli-tala, there are marble foot-prints of Sri Chaitanya, and many pilgrims visit there early in the morning as part of their circumambulation of Vrindaban.

Circling in the temple,
Bengali cousins
and their shadows.

Open courtyard,
the only roof—
sky and branches.

On a marble platform,
fresh tamarind leaves
where Sri Chaitanya sat.

A monkey in the tree
fiercely shakes
the old branch.

From a loudspeaker
emotional songs—
Yamuna in morning mist.

Black Sanskrit script:
tamarind branches
against the sky.

“Sri Krishna said, ‘The inhabitants of Vrindaban, including the *gopis*, cows, unmoving creatures such as the twin *arjuna* trees, animals, living entities with a stunted consciousness such as bushes, and snakes such as Kaliya, all achieve the perfection of life by unalloyed love for Me, and thus they very easily achieve Me.’ ”

—*Bhagavat Purana*

First dawn light
at Davanala-kund*—
a snouty hog appears.

*Davanala-kund ("the pond where there was a forest fire") is the place where Sri Krishna swallowed a blazing fire to save His friends and cows.

Sadhu

washing an old white cloth.

Lightfooted,
a mangey dog
strolls round the *kund*.

A white cow
nuzzles my chest
and won't go away.

“All the inhabitants of Vrindaban are Vaishnavas. They are all-auspicious because somehow or other they always chant the holy names of Krishna. . . . Even when they pass on the street they are fortunate enough to exchange greetings by saying the names of Radha and Krishna. Thus directly or indirectly they are auspicious.”

—*Chaitanya-charitamrita*

The click
of walking sticks
on courtyard stone.

An old woman
with cracking voice
rushes to see Damodar.

That monkey just stole food
from Damodar's altar!—
a widow smiles.

“Apparently the residents of Vrindaban, the abode of Lord Krishna, are simple householders engaged in ordinary affairs such as herding cows, cooking, rearing children, and performing religious ceremonies. However, all these activities are intensely engaged in the loving service of Lord Krishna. The residents of Vrindaban perform all activities in pure Krishna consciousness and thus exist on the most exalted platform of liberated life. The same activities performed without Krishna consciousness constitute ordinary bondage to the material world.”

—*Bhagavat Purana*

Laughing at the "white monkeys"
as they pass on rickshaw.

Predawn townsmen:
reading the cheap newsprint
by kerosene lamp.

At the Yamuna:
a tan heifer wandering.

Pounding laundry
on the riverbank,
the rising sun.

Singing, "*Jaya Radhe!*"*
in unison:
a ferryload of ladies.

*"All glories to Radha!"

“My dear boy, I wish all good fortune for you. You should go to the bank of the Yamuna, where there is a virtuous forest named Madhuban, and there be purified. Just by going there one draws nearer to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who always lives there.”

—*Bhagavat Purana*

Cowherd boys—
one boosts himself
on the buffalo's hips.

Four-footed strides
through the shallows,
a black dog.

Downriver
temple domes,
a stack of hay.

My footprints
not as deep
as the birds'.

Gently pulling,
Yamuna.

Washing off sins,
watching a cow
at sunset.

“Sometimes Krishna and Balaram would play on Their flutes, sometimes They would throw ropes and stones devised for getting fruits from the trees, sometimes They would throw only stones, and sometimes, Their ankle bells tinkling, They would play football with fruits like *bael* and *amalaki*. Sometimes They would cover Themselves with blankets and imitate cows and bulls and fight with one another, roaring loudly, and sometimes They would imitate the voices of the animals. In this way They enjoyed sporting, exactly like two ordinary human children.”

—*Bhagavat Purana*

The marble form of Krishna:
on His shoulder,
Bala rests His hand.

Sticking to His foot
with sandalwood paste,
a *tulasi* leaf.

During the Karttik season (October–November), the residents and visitors of Vrindaban take part in *parikrama*, or circumambulating Vrindaban, and in this way deepen their devotion to Krishna. As stated in the *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*, “All the results of traveling on all the pilgrimages within the three worlds can be achieved simply by touching the holy land of Vrindaban.”

The curve
of the vulture's neck
as he readies for flight.

Two parikramers
stop before the *kadamba* tree,
throwing seeds to the chipmunks.

Chilly morning—
on the path,
a cow with a burlap.

On the path—
peacock hens in the dust,
roots of the banyan.

Acrid whiff
as he passes:
cigarette smoker.

In the ripples of sand,
thousands of footprints.

On a dirt wall
a single stick
of burning incense.

Seeking *mukti*
a busload from Calcutta,
throwing baggage from the roof.

I join a river of people on *parikrama*, following the saints of history. Keeping the Deities and temples on the right, moving clockwise. . . . On the border of Vrindaban, moving inward to meet the Inconceivable.

Accepting sugar
from a *sadhu*,
my coarseness.

The path through their *ashram*—
at the water pump,
men in loincloths.

Confronted by a peacock,
we keep walking.

Red arrows mark the way—
I'm the only one with shoes.

Thoughts wandering:
the dirt trail
gradually includes me.

Stopping to sit,
the hollyhocks
bid us onward.

Quails moving
counterclockwise
in Krishna's grip.

I talk too much
sun reflections in a pond.

Calling "Radhe-e-e Shyam,"
a shaven-headed widow
passes us on the left.

“Krishna and Balaram carried binding ropes on Their shoulders and in Their hands, just like ordinary cowherd boys. While milking the cows, the boys bound the hind legs with a small rope. This rope almost always hung from the shoulders of the boys, and it was not absent from the shoulders of Krishna and Balaram. In spite of Their being the Supreme Personality of Godhead, They played exactly like cowherd boys.”

—*Bhagavat Purana*

On Govardhan-puja, a day of honoring Krishna and the cows, we go at dawn to the *goshala*. A cow greets us at the gate and accosts me until I give up my garland of orange marigolds, which she devours.

The cow's heavy breath—
in the distance,
"The Thousand Names of Vishnu."*

*A Vedic prayer containing one thousand names of Krishna, often chanted in unison.

Me and a heifer
looking out at the trail.

Imprints on the cow,
human hands
in purple paint.

Kneeling on her front legs
a black cow
settles in the dust.

Cold morning;
cow dung steaming
in the dust of Vrindaban.

Twenty days have passed, but I am not austere. Nor have I found new determination and revelation. Yet I do feel the positive effects of living here. Soon, however, I will have to leave Vrindaban and return to the West.

No longer awkward
while returning the greeting,
“Jaya Radhe!”

Walking in the dust
with a herd of cows,
not choking.

Just brushing
not killing
the flies.

Dust in my shoes,
on the desk,
on the floor.

On the roof,
all the songs from the town
becoming one.

The green parrot
in the green tree.

Drinking brackish water,
believing in Krishna's words,
"I am the taste of water."

In a week we leave. I think how to stay in the spirit of Vrindaban wherever I go. For my last seven days I vow to increase my chanting and reading.

Leading the *bhajans*,*
I forget the words—
naked, choking.

*Devotional songs.

Vrindaban factors:
 the lights go out,
 chanting is easier.

“This life of *bhakti-yoga*
 is sweet!”

“Bittersweet,” says my brother.

Over Mathura
three storks
flying south.

END OF KARTTIK—PARIKRAMA

The villagers are well aware of the different pastimes of Krishna associated with these *parikramas*. They don't perform the *parikrama* as an austerity to get something in return. They walk simply because it's time to walk around Vrindaban and Mathura. That's the Vrindaban culture.

Lighting a candle
under a banyan tree
just before dawn.

A white Brahma cow
stands facing passersby—
touching her.

End of Kartik:
roadside beggars
doing better than usual.

Seller of sacred pictures
lies down lazily
beside his wares.

Camped in the dust
A Vrindaban pilgrim
spices his *tikkia*. *

Radio and pet monkey
a *baba*
in *maya*.

*Fried potato patty.

Last visits: We leave at 5:30 in the morning by rickshaw. The sky is full of stars and cold at this hour. We avoid the dogs and hogs and hear the people chant. Our driver, Nitai, rings his bell and as if in response, a person on foot begins singing a song of Krishna. A man on a bicycle passes us singing of the Yamuna and Shyam. We follow his bicycle down dark alleys, over big ruts in the road, past shopkeepers opening their shops by kerosene light . . .

Lighting a flame,
floating it on the Yamuna—
“Vrindaban-dham ki jaya!”*

Japa on the ghat,
a V of ducks go by
in the smokey blue sky.

*“All glories to Vrindaban!”

The cold:
offering a flame
to the Yamuna.

Dark ladies
circumambulating *tulasi*
in a *ghat*-side temple.

On the street leading to the Bankabihari temple, the stones have been worn smooth by the feet of thousands of visitors. Within a few hours the entire temple will be filled with cheering devotees of Bankabihari.

Time-worn stones
leading to the temple—
this morning's cold air.

In the empty temple,
my abstract words,
cooing in the rafters.

RANGAJI TEMPLE

Accompanied by shenai and a drum, temple *brahmanas* bring water for the Deity.

Humbled
at the temple gate:
"Hindus Only!"

Sitting outside the *mandir*
under the *neem* tree
with two puppies.

Satisfied,
counting
holy names.

Last day in Vrindaban. Sitting in a small grove, watching the sunset. A peacock comes walking out of the woods and into the field, heading my way. A small boy, barefoot and wearing short pants, walks over to me and asks in Hindi for my pen.

Last day:
looking too much
at my watch.

Parrots screeching,
the air is humming
with maddened bees.

Driven out of Vrindaban
by a Sikh
in a Nissan.

"It is wrong, wrong, wrong! Alas! Alas! I saw the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Hari, and I thought He was an ordinary cowherd boy."

—Sri Sharana



GLOSSARY

Amalaki—fruit from the *amalaka*, a special tree which is to be offered water and respect by devotees.

Baba—a renunciant.

Bael Fruit—a sweet, grapefruit-size, hard-shelled fruit, often made into fruit drinks.

Bhakti-yoga—the science of devotional service to God.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu—the *avatara* of Lord Krishna in this age, whose mission is to teach love of God through the chanting of His holy names.

Dham—a holy place.

Ghat—a bathing place.

Gokula (Vrindaban)—the earthly manifestation of the topmost planet in the spiritual world, the personal abode of Lord Krishna.

Gopis—Krishna's cowherd girl friends in Vrindaban, His most confidential servitors.

Goshala—a place where cows are milked and protected.

Japa—the soft chanting of Krishna's holy names, usually done on beads.

Jiva Goswami—a great Vaishnava scholar and one of the six Vaishnava spiritual masters who directly followed Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and systematically presented His teachings.

Kadamba—a very fragrant, flowering tree found only in Vrindaban.

Kaliya—a many-hooded, highly poisonous snake driven from the Yamuna River by Krishna.

Kavi—one recognized for his expertise in poetry.

Krishna—the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Karttik—the holiest month of the year, during which devotees make arrangements for special services to Lord Krishna.

Mandir—a temple.

Madhuban—one of the twelve holy forests of Vrindaban.

Mathura—the area surrounding Vrindaban; also, the city where Krishna took birth and later returned after performing His childhood pastimes.

Maya—the illusory energy of the Supreme Lord; also, the state of forgetfulness of one's relationship with Krishna.

Mukti—liberation from the cycle of repeated birth and death.

Nanda Maharaja—the king of Vrindaban and foster father of Lord Krishna.

Narottam das Thakur—a Vaishnava spiritual master in the disciplic succession from Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Neem—a type of tree found in India that possesses medicinal properties.

Parikrama—to circumambulate a holy place.

Radha—the eternal consort of Lord Krishna and manifestation of His internal pleasure potency.

Sadhu—a saintly person.

Sanatan Goswami—one of the six Vaishnava spiritual masters who directly followed Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Tulasi—a great devotee of Lord Krishna who has assumed the form of a plant.

Vaishnava—a devotee of Lord Vishnu, Krishna.

Walla—vendor.

Yashoda—the foster mother of Lord Krishna.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami was born in New York City in 1939. He graduated from Brooklyn College, served in the Navy, and was a social welfare worker on the Lower East Side. In 1966 he became a disciple of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder-*acharya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Satsvarupa dasa Goswami now travels extensively lecturing about the ancient scriptures of India and the practice of *bhakti-yoga*. He has published numerous books in both prose and poetry, and he is editor-in-chief of *Back to Godhead*, the monthly magazine of the Hare Krishna movement. This is his second haibun.

OTHER BOOKS BY SATSVARUPA DASA GOSWAMI

Readings in Vedic Literature
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